Felix Gillet

Gold Rush Era nurseryman Nevada City, California

Beginning in the 1860s, Felix Gillet imported, bred, and introduced many of the food plants that became the foundation of perennial fruit, grape, and nut industries in California and the Pacific Northwest.

At his Barren Hill Nursery, named after the deforested slopes of Nevada City where it stood, Gillet cultivated **almonds, chestnuts, filberts, walnuts, roses, apples, apricots, cherries, figs, nectarines, peaches, pears, plums, prunes, strawberries, along with table, raisin, and wine grapes**—varieties that generations of European ancestors worked to improve, save and protect.

Several introductions gave rise to modern varieties through their genetics, while others endure in today's commercial markets. Many more remain overlooked, largely undiscovered despite their distinctive inherent strengths.

Help conserve and cultivate these living treasures. Every financial donation helps protect these 150-year-old trees for future generations through field research, education & propagation.

FELIX GILLET INSTITUTE™

Support the future of California's past.

Even a small tax-deductible gift today helps sustain the daily care of our Mother Orchard, propagate rare cultivars, preserve historic records, and expand hands-on education in grafting, pruning, and orchard stewardship. Your gift also grows community orchards, volunteer programs, and educational tours and events.

A 'Calville Rouge' apple tree thrives in a historic Sierra orchard.

'Calville Rouge' Apple

Scan Now to help Save Historic Plants

Because of your support, this living legacy endures.

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The Felix Gillet Institute

Dedicated to the appreciation, preservation, and propagation of edible and ornamental perennials from California's Gold Rush era.

felixgillet.org

The Felix Gillet Institute

Founded in 2003 by Amigo Bob Cantisano, the Institute is a 501(c)(3) educational nonprofit **dedicated to rediscovering and preserving historic plant varieties.** We explore mining-era camps, farms, homesteads, and ghost towns throughout the Sierra Nevadas and Pacific West, seeking 150-year-old perennial survivors—still producing flavorful crops with little or no care despite pests, disease, and harsh conditions.

Adam Nuber and Jenifer Bliss identify heirloom apples.

Research and Education Access

An estimated 75–95% of crop diversity has disappeared from farmers' fields since 1900. Our database documents thousands of survivors, including varietal characteristics and qualities, locations, and productivity. The best selections are propagated for organic gardeners, farmers, nurseries, researchers, and for use in breeding improved cultivars. Discover Gillet's historic catalogs and technical writings, along with a wide range of supporting information and historical notes on our website.

Mother Orchard Conservation

We rely on your community support to conserve over 175 of these organically grown varieties—because caring for these plants requires ongoing maintenance, research, propagation, documentation, and education.

Stewarding a Living Legacy
The Felix Gillet Nursery

The Felix Gillet Institute is dedicated to preserving the genetic heritage of these resilient fruits, nuts, and edible perennials. Through careful stewardship of our scion orchards, we nurture and propagate this **near-extinct living library of treasures from the Gold Rush era**—ensuring they continue to thrive in today's home gardens and farms to protect them from being lost to time. Each season, we observe, propagate, and reintroduce, extending their reach beyond the orchard and into new landscapes.

You can help preserve this living legacy of irreplaceable genetics by planting these special nursery trees in your orchard.

An old Sierra mining camp where Gillet fruit and nut trees from the 1870s still thrive more than 150 years later.

Ancient Grandmother Trees

These living museums carry hope within their limbs—that we will conserve and steward their unique qualities, flavors, and resilience to inspire, delight and nourish future generations.

Above: Adam Nuber, operations manager, collects summer budwood from Grandmother Chestnut: 'Marron de Lyon'.

Grandmother Tree: 'Princess Almond' below.